

**IN HONOURED MEMORY OF A DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR OF SOUTHEAST
ASIAN HISTORY, PROFESSOR DR. ANTHONY REID, 1939-2025**

Lee Kam Hing*



I came to know Prof Anthony Reid in late 1965 when he took over supervision of my MA thesis on the early nineteenth-century Acehnese sultanate. He had just arrived at the University of Malaya, fresh from completing his PhD at Cambridge and a remarkable overland drive from the UK with his wife, Helen. My original supervisor, Dr David Basset, was leaving for Hull University, and Tony Reid readily agreed to step in.

Tony found Malaysia to be an exciting place – distinct in many ways from the Sumatra he had studied. He arrived at a time of major political developments, including Singapore’s separation from Malaysia and the intense debates that followed about the direction of the nation-building process. He noted the country’s ethnic diversity which he, like many others, saw as both a source of strength and a cause of tension. Some of these debates played out at the University of Malaya itself, which was still able to host open forums where students, scholars and political leaders participated actively.

Related to that broader discussion was the writing of Malaysian history in a newly independent nation. Encouraged by Prof Wang Gungwu, academic staff - including younger Malaysian scholars like Rollins Bonney and Khoo Kay Kim - deliberated over new approaches to historiography. Tony was the only expatriate staff who actively took part in these conversations, as he was trying to learn and make sense of the country’s political and intellectual directions. He was well-liked and respected as a lecturer, and participated fully in the life of the campus, joining staff and students alike in regular sports and social activities. He contributed significantly to the history debates, once serving as a panelist in a public forum and often remarked how much he gained from these exchanges.

I learnt a great deal from Tony during those years, and in the decades that followed. We remained close friends, connected not just by our shared time at the university but also by a mutual scholarly interest in Aceh. I was always struck by his boundless energy. I recall a dinner

in 1971 at a *warung* in Jakarta - he had just finished a full day of interviews and was heading straight for another appointment, yet he still had time for a relaxed meal and a deep discussion about our research.

Kuala Lumpur held a special place in Tony's heart, as the city where his academic career began. While living there, he attended St. Francis Xavier Church in Petaling Jaya - the same church where his close friend, Dr Stephen Leong (from UM's History Department) and my wife, Celine, worshipped. He often returned to KL for conferences or lectures and always found time to reconnect with old friends and colleagues. During these visits, he seemed happiest reminiscing about the days when he was in UM.

Last year, during a stopover in Port Klang en route to the UK, Dr Stephen Leong and I met Tony and Helen for tea at the Lake Club. Sadly, that would be our final meeting with him.

12 June 2025

* **Professor Dr. Lee Kam Hing** is a former Professor in the Department of History, University of Malaya, and currently serves as a Professor at New Era University